

Navy Yard Quarters B
E side of drill fireld, Navy yard
Washington
District of Columbia

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Written Historical and Descriptive Data
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NAVY YARD QUARTERS B (SECOND OFFICER'S HOUSE)

Location: East of the Drill field and southeast of the Commandant's house of the Washington Navy Yard, Washington, District of Columbia.

Present Owner: The United States Navy.

Present Occupant: The United States Navy.

Present Use: Residence of high ranking Navy Officer.

Significance: Quarters B was built as a residence near 1800 and possibly pre-dates the Navy Yard. The house stood through damage during the War of 1812 and has been continuously used as the residence of the second ranking officer on the post.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Quarters B was built near 1800 as a two-and-a-half floor brick, gable roofed residence. It played an important part in the initial development of the Washington Navy Yard as one of the United States' most important and historic military installations. The house may have existed at the time the Navy Yard was started, but its exact origin is uncertain. It appears to have been built near 1800 from surface evidence, but several additions and remodelings have covered the original fabric. The dates of the changes are not known, but the present disposition of the house and its service wings is the same as shown on mid-19th Century maps of the Yard.

The original house was a small rectangular structure one room deep and perhaps two rooms wide and two-and-a-half stories high. This was the southern end of the present house. The structure has been extended twice to the north using the same height and width. The service wings were also added to the north. The earliest known photograph of the house, taken in 1861, shows the basic blocks in place, though there were some later modifications. During the early 20th-Century the dining room which is at the north end of the main block was extended out to the front or west to the width of the porch and a second floor gallery was added to match the existing gallery along the rest of the front.

Round-Shot to Rockets by Taylor Peck covers the history of Quarters B by the following items:

"Quarters B was remodeled in 1801 from the original farm house as Quarters of the second officer of the yard.... the rear wall....originally formed part of the eastern boundary wall of the yard."

"Officers of the Federal troops stationed at the yard in 1861 were quartered in the second officer's house...."

"On October 10, 1801, the contract for the first permanent building in the yard was let to Lovering and Dyer of Washington. This was the house of the second officer of the yard...."

During the War of 1812, "It has been said that Admiral Cockburn ordered the houses of Captain Tingey and Colonel Wharton as well as the Marine Barracks burned, but desisted when owners of adjacent property pleaded that their homes could not be saved."

"The buildings at the Yard which remained unharmed by the conflagration were the guardhouse at the gate, the residence of the Commandant, and the house which had been built as part of the east wall and which was the residence of the second officer and the offices of the purser and paymaster combined.

There is some question as to when the house was built, that is whether it preceded the Yard or not. Sources contradict each other on this point. Even though Quarters A and B were spared being put to the torch during the War of 1812, they were plundered and stripped by the citizens of Washington. Mid-19th Century maps show the south end of the house as the purser-paymaster office, but any physical evidence of this dual function has been destroyed.

In his discussion of the Washington Navy Yard in Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Talbot Hamlin states that Latrobe did not design Quarters B or A as is sometimes believed. He indicates that there may have been some interior decoration by Latrobe in the two houses, but this is little in evidence. The house was known in 1801 and Latrobe's work began at the Yard in 1803. At present there is little evidence of Latrobe's work any place but the Navy Yard Gate, and this has been much altered and expanded.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Quarters B is a two-and-a-half floor, 1800, brick residence with a slate gable roof and side wings. The main block is 106 by 33 feet with a continuous two floor porch across the front. The structure is built in a long narrow fashion along the old east wall of the Washington Navy Yard. The setting is amid residential planting, across the street from the Navy Yard Drill Field, and southeast of the Commandant's House. The structure is well maintained, attractively furnished, and is used as the residence of a Flag Officer of the U. S. Navy.

The main block of the house is long and narrow with rooms arranged across the front one deep and the halls along the rear. The first floor has an entry hall running to the main rear hall and has three formal rooms to the south and the dining room to the north. The main stairs and the service stair are in the rear halls. The second floor of the main block has four bedrooms and four baths, none of which are original in all features. Both stories have replacement wooden board floors and plaster walls and ceilings. The trim is molded wood with high basemolds and simple door and window trim. This trim has been changed several times.

On the first floor all main rooms have fireplaces, those in the two southern rooms are low arched Victorian slate with molded design and scroll keystones. Those in the two northern rooms are brick and do not appear original in design or size. On the second floor most storage space is derived from added closets and built-in wardrobes. Some doors have three light transoms. These wood panel doors have two over one over two panels. Three of the bedrooms have fireplaces, two with low arched Victorian mantels and one with a later brick mantel.

There is a continuous two floor porch running along the entire front of the house. There is a screened-in area and a glassed area on the first floor and there are glassed areas on the north and south ends of the second floor. These have asphalt tile on the floors and acoustic tile on the ceiling.

The third floor of the main block has limited headroom and would be best termed a finished attic. There are three main rooms, a storage room and a bathroom arranged in a string. Three dormers have been added in the front of the house to service these rooms and a skylight protrudes from the rear. The stair well rail has removable slats for moving of furniture up and down from the third floor. There is a variety of 19th Century hardware on the third floor, some with composition and china knobs. There are several rim-lift-latch-knob locks, and one highly crude and antique rim lock with a very small brass knob. Even though this fixture seems to be quite old it is not original to this door.

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The service wings consist of a kitchen to the north of the main block and several smaller rooms to the north of this. The kitchen section has a second floor, and the exterior of the wings are done to match the main house in white painted brick.

A full basement runs under most of the main house. This area has brick and stone walls, cement floors and unfinished hewn and sawn joists above. The basement is entered from the south end of the house by means of an exterior stair with double sloping doors. A former exterior basement entrance is evident on the west side and in the north corner of the main block. This stair was blocked at the time that the dining room was extended to the west.

The exterior of the main block presents a harmonious appearance with a continuous gable roof and the two floor porch. The entire is fenced in with a wrought iron fence. The cornice is bracketed and the second floor front porch has a railing with a cut-in pattern of fiddle shapes and leaves. In spite of the harmony of the ten bays the main block was built in three sections with the southernmost the largest and probably the first. The construction joints between the sections, the interior thicknesses of walls and a slight difference in roof levels differentiate the three sections. The original stairway, character and room disposition are now lost. The deviation of lintels over the doors and windows suggests that the original south structure had five bays with a door in each end bay and windows in between. This dual door evidence fits well with the mid-19th Century maps of the Navy Yard showing the house of the second officer in the north end of the building and the office of the purser-paymaster in the south end. The original floor plan of this section has been so changed as to leave little evidence of its original arrangement. This section was made into two rooms separated by an archway that runs down the center of the space blocking off one of the original windows on the front of the house. The remaining two sections of the house appear to have been built later, but were probably in place by the mid-19th Century - this is shown in antique photos.

The stages of construction from surface evidence and photographs started with the southern portion of the main block and went in two stages to the north. The service wings were built near the same time that the northernmost section of the main block was built. The two floor porch was built across the front of the house over the southern and middle sections. At the time that the dining room was extended to the front its wall was built to the front and flanking the two floor porch at the southernmost section of the main block. Above the dining room extension the second floor porch was extended to match existing.

At the time of this inspection the house was occupied as a residence by a high ranking Naval Officer. The building was well maintained and attractively furnished in a manner preserving its basic fabric.